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Moreover, efficient transportation brought some light industry to Tapu itself. Instead of working with their fathers on the land as they had for centuries, young men began going to the factories. The wages they brought home often made the difference between having just enough to eat and having plenty to eat. Few farmers sold their land or gave up farming, but by 1960, nearly every family had at least one member working outside the village for a cash income to supplement the seasonal income from the land.

During the period in which they were building the railroad, the Japanese also built a large network of irrigation canals in the Taipei basin, easing greatly the burden of Peihotien's farmers. An irrigation dam built across the river a mile or so upstream from the village lowered the frequency of flooding in the village and ended completely the economic usefulness of the river. Large boats can no longer go freely up and down the stream, and fishing has disintegrated to a sport enjoyed by village boys. The only economic value the river now has for villagers is in the employment of a few of the more destitute women. Building contractors hire them on a piece-work basis to gather stones of a particular size for making concrete. The work is hot, heavy, and miserably paid, but it is vital to several village families during the seasons when the women can find no work weeding fields or cleaning vegetables for market.

Nowadays the river is considered at best a convenient supply of water and at worst a threat, be it real or imagined. Every morning a dozen or so women come down to the river's edge to do their laundry and gossip, and in the evening the village water buffalo are allowed a leisurely soak in the shallow water. For the greater part of the day the beach is deserted. An occasional handful of children venture down to play in the sand, but for most of them the river area is forbidden. During the hot days of summer, busy mothers are hard put to keep their children from wading and by the time they are through primary school, most boys have learned to swim by one stratagem or another. Parental fears are not unjustified. Besides the many drownings that resulted from capsized ferries in the old days, there have been several swimmers lost in more recent years. To the villagers these past drownings add immensely to the realistic dangers of the river since it is believed that the souls of those who drown must remain in the water as unhappy ghosts until they pull in another victim to take their place.

A man in his forties described the ways of ghosts in telling me

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When I have to buy something, I have to go and ask Lim Chieng-cua for it."

Lim A-pou is not one of the village "wanderers," but she is less constrained now about airing her grievances to one or two sympathetic neighbors than she once was. She is always careful as to what she says, touching only on disparities that are apparent to all. The extent to which she exploits the villagers' general lack of sympathy with Lim Chieng-cua's wife is adroit. One of my favorite "wanderers," always eager to tell me about Lim family affairs, reflects the none too subtle influence of A-pou in her views: "In the Lim family, the wor[illegible]s divided between two brothers, but now that one brother is dead, that half of the family has it very hard. They take care of the fields but have to give all of the money they earn to Lim Chieng-cua. There is a lot of bad feeling between the two wives, Chui-ieng and A-pou. Chui-ieng always wants to manage everything. When Lim So-lan lived in the house she often suffered from that woman. Sometimes when So-lan was cooking, Chui-ieng would purposely drop sweepings into the food so that the old man would scold poor So-lan. Even A-pou felt sorry for So-lan. Chui-ieng never talks to A-pou if she can help it, and she never faces her fully when she does have to tell her something.

"They ought to divide the family and I don't see why they don't. Maybe there aren't any relatives who can do it for them [i.e., act as arbiters on the division of the property]. Lim A-pou's people work very hard in the fields and give all the money to the family. Lim Chieng-cua manages the cement bag factory. Who knows whether or not he gives the money the factory earns to the family? He had to borrow a lot of money and now the family is deeply in debt. He ought to let A-pou manage the family money and see if she can't do better."

The debts to which this woman refers illustrate Lim A-pou's misunderstanding of the management of the family factory. When Lim Chieng-cua is so fortunate as to receive a large order from one of his contracting companies, he is not paid until the order is filled. Since this might mean two or three months work and his factory workers cannot go unpaid longer than a week without suffering real hardships, he uses both factory accounts and family accounts to pay wages. On occasion he is forced to borrow from relatives to meet any large expenses that might arise in his own family. All too frequently the gossips note the borrowing but not the repaying.